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Senate

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, You alone are our God, our sure defense and safe haven. Give us the wisdom to refuse to trust in our strength but to depend totally on You. Continue to illuminate the minds of our lawmakers as You lead them with Your truth.

Lord, purify their mistakes and remove their disappointments as they strive to live for Your glory. Arise up and help them. Ransom them with Your unfailing love. Lord of Heaven's armies, stay among us as You continue to be our fortress for life's journey.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will pro-

ceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Paloma Adams-Allen, of the District of Columbia, to be a Deputy Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Alaska.

CORONAVIRUS

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I have come to the floor this afternoon, unexpectedly. I had anticipated that I was going to be taking the long trek home, for even a short weekend, going back to Alaska. That is not the case this weekend, unfortunately.

Our COVID numbers are at alltime highs, and most of the events and meetings that I would have had back home canceled. They are on Zoom. So life is just a little bit different. You roll with it. And it means that I am here in Washington, DC, on this Friday afternoon.

But I opened up the paper this morning, the Anchorage Daily News, our largest statewide newspaper, to, again, headlines that have just kind of unfolded over these past weeks with more just grim and difficult news. The headline today is: "Alaska infection rate remains high with over 1,200 new COVID cases."

We are leading—we are leading the Nation right now in our COVID rates, and it is interesting. Alaska has—we are separated enough geographically, but through the advantages of air travel and road travel, we mix, we mingle, we get around, and the virus knows no bounds, as we all know. But as we are seeing, thankfully, the case counts beginning to decline here in the lower 48, Alaska is doing just the opposite.

I am quoting here from our paper:

On average, the U.S. saw a 26% decrease in cases over the last two weeks while Alaska recorded an 84% increase.

They go on to say:

If Alaska were a country, it would be the nation with the world's highest per capita case rate, according to data from the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University.

The article proceeds to state that:

Alaska's 171 average daily cases per 100,000 over the last seven days is nearly double the rate seen in West Virginia, which . . . [is currently] second in the [Nation]. Bermuda and Serbia, at the top of the global list, have a case rate of 99.

So we are at 171 average daily cases per 100,000. It has been challenging. We are a State that has limited capacity. We have got a smaller population, obviously. But that also means that we have fewer hospitals. We have more limited means, in terms of our ability to care for those who have become very, very sick, and it is straining—it is really maxing out our hospitals to levels that we really just could not have even anticipated could happen.

As our hospitals are maxed out, it is not just the capacity, the number of people that you can put into your ICU; it is those who are daily doing the work of caring for those who are coming into our hospitals, coming in sicker and staying longer. We have maxed out our hospitals, and when I say "maxing out," in the Alaska vernacular, basically that means there is no room at the hospital. Our largest hospital is Providence, Alaska Regional, Mat-Su, Alaska Native Medical Center, Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, Bartlett—they are at capacity within their ICUs, and let me share with you what it means to be at capacity in your ICU.

I will share. I was at Alaska Regional just a weekend ago—actually, now two weekends ago—and I was told that their ICU, which is a 16-bed ICU, had been expanded to 20; and 100 percent of the beds, when I was there on that Saturday, were occupied by COVID patients with no room for anyone else to come to that particular medical facility.

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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